

ANNUAL PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 1929

Since our last Annual Convention little change has taken place in the general situation of the organization. The Locals are moving quietly along, with practically the same faithful membership carrying on as usual. No particular growth that can be tabulated has taken place, and likewise no manifest decay. This situation is causing no little concern among some of our membership, and some suggestions have been offered as to ways and means of creating more interest and enthusiasm, and increasing the membership. In trying to analyze the situation and estimate values of suggestions offered, I am not very enthusiastic over probable results. This conclusion has not been reached without giving the matter serious consideration, nor has the conclusion itself caused me to view the future with pessimism or alarm. Of course, I would like to see all the farmers in Alberta so filled with appreciation of the wonderful accomplishments of the U.F.A. and so impressed with the necessity of perpetuating its life and vigor that conscience would permit none of them to neglect keeping up their active membership, but to expect immediate results even approaching this desirable condition would be vain.

Nevertheless, I would like to see a real revival of interest in the U.F.A. When I say a "real revival" I mean one based on the solid foundation of a keen realization of responsibility. This, to my mind, is the only kind of revival that will be followed by stability and growth. In fact, I do not believe the farmers of Alberta would respond to a trivial or spurious rallying cry. They are not wandering around aimlessly in an industrial jungle, waiting for a leader to direct their movements. They are already in action, moving in an orderly, confident manner in the direction they confidently believe leads to the open lands of industrial freedom. Thirty-six thousand of them are marching in the Wheat Pool ranks; a lesser number in the Livestock Pool. They are active in the Dairy Pool, in the Egg and Poultry Pool, and in various other enterprises. In fact, there never was so much activity among the Alberta farmers as at the present time.

The Wheat Pool is stronger and its members are more alive and active than ever before; also more confident of the future. I am informed that the same is true of the other Pools. The Alberta Government, for which the U.F.A. is responsible, has a record of achievement that is highly satisfactory, not only to the U.F.A. membership, but also to the citizens of Alberta in general. The U.F.A. Federal members, for whom this organization is responsible, are carrying on seemingly to the satisfaction of all concerned. The question is: On what call to action will we base an attempted rallying of our Locals in revival and new life?

It goes without argument that the life of our organization must continue if the farmers of Alberta are to hold their present position in industrial reform and social reconstruction. It is true that most of our organized activities are being carried on outside of the organization, but the U.F.A. is the parent of all of them—the foundation of the whole structure. No structure is safe after its foundation has crumbled.

Importance of Our Political Movement

Even admitting that our commercial enterprises are of primary importance and that it were possible for them to live and thrive after the decay of the U.F.A., the importance of sustaining our political reform would be in nowise minimized thereby. The U.F.A. Locals are the machinery through which our political movement functions democratically. Without this machinery it could not so function and all the progress we have made politically would at once become nullified.

It is not an accident that the Alberta Government has such a wide and favorable reputation for sane business and efficiency. The members of the Government have nothing to do but take care of the business of the Province, while you operate the political machinery, and elect them for that purpose. You operate the machinery with the greatest possible efficiency, and the least possible expense, and you demand of your elected members that they administer the affairs of the Province likewise. We have no reason to believe that a farmers' party that had to build, finance, and operate its own machinery, and fight its way to power would be any more efficient and economical in administering the business of the Province than any other government. What has been saved to the people of Alberta by the breaking down of wrong political machinery can never be accurately estimated, but it should be clear to every thinking man and woman in the Province that we cannot afford to take a chance by reverting to the old system.

While, for a long time, I have believed that industrial reform must precede political reform, there is little if any difference in their relative importance. While we can not legislate right industrial structure into existence, neither can we succeed in building right industrial structure against wrong and opposing legislation. As right industrial construction proceeds, it must be supported by sustaining legislation.

To let the U.F.A. lapse would be disastrous not only to our political movement, but would mark the beginning of disintegration that would endanger our whole organized movement, including the Pools. It is needless to say that we can not afford to take any such chance, and I do not believe there is any very serious danger. But how are we to maintain the strength and perpetuate the life of the parent organization?

In dealing with this question, an analysis of the situation and its causes is the only proper starting point. Then, let us ask ourselves the question: "What is it that is wrong with the U.F.A.?" About the only criticism we ever hear is that the membership is not so large as it should be—not nearly so large as it once was. This falling away of our membership from the peak is a matter of record, and must be faced frankly and dealt with seriously and intelligently. We must try neither to under-estimate nor over-estimate its significance. What is its real significance? Does it mean a repudiation of the principles of the organization, or a lack of faith in the ability of the organization to accomplish the work it set out to do?

Every Objective Attained

It can mean neither of these. It cannot mean the latter because the organization has accomplished every definite objective undertaken. It cannot mean the former because there is nothing to indicate that the delinquent members are not supporting the institutions promoted and organized by the U.F.A. as loyally as they supported the U.F.A. itself in the organization of these institutions. It may be they think that in the organization of these activities the U.F.A. has completed its mission and is no longer of sufficient importance to merit their active support. While this may be true of some individuals, I do not believe it is true of any considerable number. No one who has seriously thought the matter out could come to such a conclusion.

I believe the trouble with the large majority of these delinquent members is that they have become interested in the activities of the Pools, and seeing nothing of special immediate importance going on in the U.F.A. they have become indifferent and negligent of their duty. In their zeal for larger, newer and more exciting things, they have forgotten the importance of those quieter, more intimate duties. It has been a lack of serious thinking, rather than wrong thinking.

This analysis of the situation does not explain away the trouble. It is an attempt to locate the trouble in order that we may intelligently deal with it. That the trouble is real, and the situation serious enough to warrant most earnest consideration can not be gainsaid. It is said that trouble or difficulties in the way of progress exist only for the purpose of being removed. How are we going to solve the difficulties confronting us in order that our progress may not be endangered or retarded?

In the course of human progress there are many events in widely separate spheres of thought and activity that bear a close analogy to each other. Not so very long ago drug stores were filled with patent medicine cure-alls. A patient suffering from some ailment was given some particular brand of these nostrums, prescribed by a well-meaning neighbor who had not even attempted to diagnose the disease, and knew little about the medicinal qualities of the remedy prescribed. Today these cure-alls have practically disappeared from the drug shelves, and from the advertising columns. For the past 50 years sick farmers' organizations have been offered, and have been offering, all kinds of ready-made nostrums for their social and economic ills. For years they swallowed them as rapidly as offered, to find that they left disappointment and a bad taste only. They are fed up on them. Today they want to know what they are taking and why they are taking it—what the trouble is and the reasons for believing the remedy prescribed will cure it.

In dealing with the present situation in the U.F.A., there is little or nothing to be gained by offering artificial stimulants in the form of impractical appeals. To go out to the Locals with a hackneyed appeal on some thread-bare question that does not offer action with reasonable hope of results will be futile—worse than futile because its tendency will be to deaden the interest that is now only dormant. The situation must be met by the farmers themselves. It is their interests that are involved; the solution of the problem is in their hands, and they alone can solve it. It is the duty of every member of the organization to get as clear an understanding as possible of what is involved, and then take up his part of the work in a practical, businesslike way. Each will have work to do as an individual, but all must work together for a common end.

Responsibility of the Locals

The whole problem is a simple one and the work will not be difficult. The organization is composed of Locals, and the Locals of individuals. Unless the individuals will keep up the Locals, the organization will cease to exist. There is a certain amount of assistance Central can give the Locals, but the amount is limited and costly. The proper function of Central is to take care of the details of the work of the organization as a whole. This is necessary and must be done and should be done both economically and efficiently. Central can carry on the work of keeping up the membership of the Locals neither economically nor efficiently. Why should some one from Central go out to your Local to tell you that you should pay your dues? This process costs more money than the dues amount to, consequently is an economic waste. There are over 12,000 faithful members in the Locals scattered over the Province. They understand the importance of keeping up the strength and growth of the organization. It is their organization. It is also their Central. It is they rather than Central who are interested in the economy and efficiency of carrying on, as well as in the life, growth and vigor of the organization.

But some say that there is nothing to do in the Locals; that it is hard to get a meeting of the members and impossible to collect dues except from the faithful few. While I admit there is an element of truth in this idea, I think there is a greater element of error. In our zeal to get our larger, and seemingly more important co-operative enterprises launched and in successful operation, haven't we overlooked the importance of local co-operation?

We believe that co-operation is the true law of life and the only hope of humanity, and that it must be developed to perfection. It is my belief that so far as the Alberta Farmers are concerned, nothing approaching perfection will be reached until our larger enterprises are supported by highly developed co-operative Locals; and they must be supported by practically all the farmers in the Province. The Locals must support the larger enterprises and the individuals must support the Locals. This is the process of developing strength and solidarity in our greater enterprises from which the individuals will derive their benefits.

The Locals are not only the workshops in which the individuals must develop the habit and spirit and learn the science of co-operation, but there is much necessary co-operation that can be done only through the Locals. This is community co-operation. How many communities are getting the best possible results in dealing with community problems? These problems are many, including all business, social and educational activities. Every community has these problems and they are being dealt with intelligently or let drift. They can be dealt with intelligently only through organized co-operation.

In modern industrial advancement, isolation and individualism have reduced agriculture to poverty and made the farmer the butt of the crude jokes of the vulgar world. Modern improvements of transportation and communication facilities have released the farmer from his former condition of isolation, and made it possible and practicable for him to develop community life to the extent of his own desires. The U.F.A. Local, working in co-operative harmony with the U.F.W.A. and the Junior U.F.A., should be the most active and progressive institution in every rural community in the Province. This kind of work carried on intelligently throughout this Province for ten years will make Alberta a better place to live in than the world has ever known. In thus solving our community problems, we would at the same time solve the problems in all our larger activities. This will involve the continuous activity of the Locals, but it can be made attractive by being carried on in a practical, methodical way.

Doing First Things First

Begin at the beginning by doing first things first. I would suggest that the logical first thing to do would be to make a record of all the available desirable material for membership in the community, including men, women and juniors. Carefully analyze this material and then begin your campaign for membership. It might be advisable to stage a rally, but I would certainly advise against trying to work up an over-amount of enthusiasm with the idea that when the rally is over the work is done. The reaction from such a rally is liable to be discouraging and leave your Local in worse condition than before. A methodical, constructive program is the only practical method—the only hope.

There is always a narrow margin between those in the Local and some on the outside. A little more effort would bring in some of those outsiders. I am convinced that well directed effort on the part of all members would promote a continuous growth of the Local until all the useful, desirable material is secured. This work need not be made unnecessarily onerous, but it is a part of the process and must be carried on continuously.

While the building up of the membership of the Locals is the first essential, it is not an end within itself. It is rather the formation of your

forces for efficient work. This work consists of dealing with every local community problem that exists, or may arise. In regard to what the problems may be, I cannot undertake to tabulate them. They will not be the same in every community. New ones will arise, and the aspect of old ones will change. They will include all the problems involved in making your community better, socially and financially. Whatever the nature of the problem may be, it can be dealt with more intelligently and efficiently through co-operation than any other way.

There should be the closest kind of co-operation and mutual assistance between the U.F.A. and the U.F.W.A. Locals, and both should give guidance and assistance to the juniors. The rising generation cannot begin too early to learn to put into practice intelligent co-operation. Other institutions take a much more lively interest in guiding the trend of thought of their young people. We do not want to teach them creed or dogma, but we should put forth every effort to teach them to live and work in conformity with the true laws of life, thus fitting them to take their proper places in the upward social struggle.

U.F.W.A. President's Address

It is very encouraging to be able to report that this year's work has been genuinely successful in point of membership, interest, and activity. Our membership usually has been a small replica of the main organization. We had the same proportionate decrease in 1922, the same struggle in the years immediately following to maintain that level. Then came a year or two when the organization strengthened perceptibly in interest and activity, and last year there was a small increase in membership. Finally, this year our records show an increase of over five hundred members in U.F.W.A. Locals. We have also five hundred women members in U.F.A. Locals — altogether over a thousand more women members than were shown on the records last year. But in addition to this, from contact with farm women throughout the Province, I believe that this number represents only a fraction of the women who are genuinely in sympathy with our work, who attend meetings in many cases with regularity, and who are ardent advocates of our marketing and political activities.

Some Locals admit women members without fee. In the life of such communities the women play their part through the U.F.A. and have all the privileges that pertain to the Local, but nevertheless, they have no standing at Central, and no recognition as part of the Provincial organization. There are many phases of this membership problem that have been taken up from year to year, but I am convinced that insofar as Central records are concerned the question of membership will continue to take up an undue amount of the time of the officers of the Central Board, and be a continuous source of anxiety to Local secretaries, until a more efficient method of collecting membership fees is devised and put into operation.

If that can be done we shall see an unparalleled increase in the next few years. For we have a sturdy, vigorous growth; healthy, active Locals; a clear vision and the right spirit.

Farm Women's Interest in Wheat Pool

Sometimes I am led to think that people in general regard the marketing of our wheat and the success of the Wheat Pool as matters purely of masculine concern. But if they were to "listen in" to some of our Local meetings, or have an insight into the workings of the rural feminine mind,

I am not at all sure but that the discovery would be made that farm women are concerned even more greatly than men in the success of this great undertaking. For the big items of expense, such as machinery, labor, taxes, etc., a way must be found to get the money, or arrangements made to "carry on" for another year. But too often the necessities of the moment in the matter of shoes, and clothes, and groceries, must come from some invisible fund, or be circumvented by endless scrimping and saving. In too many homes this winter there are farm women faced with just this problem. And though their names may not appear on the list of Wheat Pool members, and though their voices may not be heard where Pool policies are decided, in season and out of season these women are lending moral support and praying for the success of the Pool.

Does it seem strange to you, as you struggle with a budget that refuses to balance, to learn that comfort and luxury have greatly increased in Canada. It appears, however, that such is the case, in a table prepared by one of our strongest banks, appearing in the "Times Trade Supplement." Here are the figures to prove the increase in Canadian prosperity: "Between 1923 and 1928 the value of imports of Oriental carpets has increased from \$463,000 to \$1,141,000; of silk and its products from \$20,156,000 to \$29,963,000; perfumery, cosmetics, etc., from \$72,000 to \$1,313,000, and jewellery from \$986,000 to \$1,858,000." I shall not quote the entire list, but going over it I observed that about the only increase that could mean much to farm women was the increase in washing machines. For certainly Oriental rugs have not been a matter of general purchase, nor has replenishing the family jewellery of the farm meant much in the national budget. And while the bank pleasantly looks forward to a "continued improvement in the general standard of living," we concur in the laudable sentiment, but from a vastly different viewpoint.

Our Conception of "Prosperity"

Not until Canadian prosperity is totalled in terms of general contentment and happiness; not until the grim spectre of unemployment no longer dogs the footsteps of men willing and eager to work for their daily bread; not until a compilation of figures agrees that the men and women who produce the necessities of life (may they live in town and city, or the open country) have a fair measure of that leisure, and freedom, and security, and wider life that now belongs altogether too exclusively to those few who are entrenched so solidly behind the walls of special privilege—whose purchases swell the list of Oriental rugs and costly jewellery—and certainly, not until luxury for the few is balanced by comfort for the many, will the farm women of Alberta "view with satisfaction" present economic conditions. But the exceedingly satisfactory thing to report is, that while in the past we may have echoed these sentiments as abstract platitudes, now we voice them as concrete propositions—the door still may be locked, but the key is in our pocket.

And while the calibre of our women enables them to face deprivation and hard physical work without flinching, theirs is no slave philosophy content to submit to a scheme of things wherein they find themselves in an age of tremendous mechanization unable to afford any but the most primitive tools to carry on their daily routine: to be in truth for much of their days veritable hewers of wood and drawers of water—particularly, the carrying of water. What a gigantic waste of woman power that year after year on so many farms, thousands of gallons of water are carried in and waste is carried out by hand!

Electricity and Public Ownership

Is it any wonder then, that when the subject of electrical distribution of power for rural homes was first broached this summer that the response on the part of farm people was a spontaneous enthusiasm possibly equalled by no other project. What the future of electrical usage in the heavier

mechanical operations of the farm will be, does not come within the scope of this report, but if electrical power could be transmitted to rural areas at cost there is to my mind no one thing that would so quickly revolutionize farm homes. To think of electricity for lighting, for washing, for ironing; electrical refrigeration, vacuum cleaning, sewing machines, to name just a few of the unsatisfactory back-breaking jobs whose drudgery would be eliminated, indicates some of the first installations that probably would be made under a Provincial scheme of power distribution at cost. And so, farm women are tremendously interested in the inquiry being made, at the suggestion of the Premier, as to the cost of distribution of electricity to farm homes. The question of the ownership and control of this utility will loom large in our minds in the immediate future. To quote briefly from an article in a recent issue of "The U.F.A.": "In dealing with this phase of electricity in the agricultural industry, it is unquestionable that the only hope of an abundant supply of cheap power on the farm will be through the establishment of electric power for this purpose at cost. Wherever private companies are supplying energy there can be no object in them making a connection that will not pay a profit. The sole object of a Provincially-owned power scheme on the other hand, would be to give service to the agricultural industry as well as to the urban centres." We have in Alberta a shining example of the efficiency and service of a publicly-owned utility in the Telephone System. And farm women look forward with enthusiasm to the day in the not too far distant future when we shall remit our electricity dues to the Government in the same way as we now send in our monthly dues for the telephone.

Problems of Public Health

Our women's Locals continue to stress the question of public health. And while we wish to pay tribute to the progressive, far-sighted policies of our Provincial Department of Health, and the particularly excellent service rendered by the travelling clinic, we cannot fail to recognize that we have with us still the staggering problem of a terrific maternal and infant mortality, and an altogether inexcusable number of school children succumbing each year, or permanently injured through preventable disease. What is to be the remedy? Are we to continue gathering statistics and deploring the situation, or shall we take definite, practical steps to meet the need? Last year our women went on record in favor of health centres whose cost would be borne by the Department of Health and the municipalities concerned, which would provide continuous health service, and be effective for the control of disease and the conservation of life. From these centres would radiate health activities for the community. Here would be a focal point for pre-natal advice and post-natal care. Experience has shown too, that it is not sufficient that such service merely be available—it must be carried right into the homes, and information disseminated by means of house to house visits. Here is where the public-health nurse would have an opportunity of taking a hand in a campaign of conservation infinitely more valuable to the State than any program heralded by the clash of drums. The Federal Department of Health might well assume a measure of responsibility in the maintainance of such service. The capacity for service of such a form of organization as would be required to meet these needs is inestimable, including as it would in its scope not only the care of mothers and babies, but also the regular care of school children; the detection and control of contagious disease; Surveys of sub-normal children and mental deficients; tubercular clinics; and in general continuous health supervision.

The Provincial Department of Health is ready to go ahead with such a program; the Rockefeller Foundation will provide certain finances as a contribution to international health; and the Federal Department of Health is, I understand, not averse to making provision for financial assistance for county and district health departments, in its estimates next year. So

it remains for the municipalities, and for the ratepayers therein, to take up this thoughtful, constructive health program which presents a clear-cut challenge to existing mortality and sickness.

The Greatest Achievement of Rural Women

Altogether our Locals are proving genuine study groups where, in addition to the subjects indicated, our women are delving into many and varied phases of education, marketing, junior work, legislation, immigration, and world peace. Perhaps this is the greatest achievement possible to rural women, that instead of calm acceptance of, or ignorant railing against conditions, there is now an eager, questioning, thoughtful group, not disposed to shirk either mental or physical work, but clearly challenging an existing social order which not only permits, but ensures, the degradation of great masses of people. And the blinding vision which our men and women have glimpsed through organization, and group activity, in the substitution of a new law of life, is a change more profound than any ever ushered in through the din of warfare or the clamor of machinery. May I quote a line or two from Mrs. Parlbys address to the International Wheat Pool Congress last year: "Some would-be reformers today are impatient with the slow upward progress of society. They preach violent doctrine and whisper of revolutions as the only way to arrive at the goal they desire. And in their blindness they do not sense the fact that co-operation is itself a revolution as radical, as fundamental as anything they could desire, and is peacefully and quietly at work in many different countries transforming economic thought and the economic structure of society."

This transformation is an utter negation of the things that men and nations have so long revered, and indicates in marked degree the dethronement of strength and power as the guiding forces of humankind. To quote Mrs. Parlbys again: "We have discovered that it (co-operation) has its roots in the things of the spirit; that its highest qualities are loyalty, service, honor. We have learnt that without these qualities it can never win the final battle against strongly entrenched opposition."

And so because we have learned the utter futility of continuing in the old way, of hoping that out of evil good might one day come, we, in company with people of many nations and tongues and creeds, each in our own way, are working towards a common ideal—that of perfecting a new form of civilization, wherein we may aspire to be fellow-workers with Him, Who "weaves the ages as a work upon a loom."

Respectfully submitted,

S. M. GUNN.